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## **Vt. walk aims to spur action on global warming**

RIPTON — Bill McKibben can't recall the last time more than 200 Americans launched a five-day walk calling for government action on global warming. And so he deemed what happened in his Vermont town Thursday to be historic.

"It's perhaps the largest single demonstration yet in this country against global warming," the Middlebury College environmental scholar said. "It's time to start summoning the political will to do something."

McKibben, whose book "The End of Nature" was the first about climate change written for a general audience, joined walkers from throughout Vermont and as far away as California to kick off a symbolic march seeking national movement on the planet's hottest environmental issue.

Participants assembled at the Robert Frost trail on Route 125 in Ripton to start a 49-mile walk north to Burlington, where a Labor Day rally will ask statewide political candidates to support the goals of a Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act just introduced by U.S. Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt.

"We've got people from Montreal and Massachusetts, but we're mainly centered on Vermonters," said Rebecca Sobel, state organizer of the Project HotSeat campaign for environmental activist group Greenpeace. "People no longer are questioning the science of global warming. They're demanding solutions."

Sobel's group distributed postcards that ask congressional candidates to address climate change. The Vermont Public Interest Research Group offered specific solutions as it used the walk to release a new report, "Rising to the Challenge: Six Steps to Cut Global Warming Pollution in the United States."

The report, available on [www.vpirg.org](http://www.vpirg.org), calls for curbing fossil-fuel emissions by cutting back on vehicle travel, increasing fuel economy standards to 40 miles per gallon, replacing 10 percent of gasoline use with cleaner-burning options, reducing home and business energy consumption by 10 percent and obtaining 20 percent of electricity from

renewable sources.

"We have hit the tipping point," VPIRG Executive Director Paul Burns said. "People have recognized climate change is real and we have an obligation to do something about it."

For Elizabeth Courtney, head of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, that meant not only offering her organization's support, but also joining the walk herself.

"There's a lot of individual and community action that has been taken," Courtney said, "but we don't see that taking place in Washington, D.C."

The exception: Jeffords' recent introduction of a Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act that calls for cutting the nation's carbon dioxide emissions by at least 80 percent in the next half-century.

Jeffords will be returning to Congress on Monday, but a representative from his office will appear at the walk's wrap-up Labor Day rally along Lake Champlain in Burlington.

The march is drawing people from throughout the state and nation. Raven Burchard came from Brattleboro not only to walk all five days, but also to volunteer as an emergency medical technician.

"Ultimately this is the issue," Burchard said. "Politics won't mean squat if we can't survive on this planet."

Jolie Lonner came from San Francisco, Calif., to pitch in as a global warming campaigner with Greenpeace.

"The United States needs to play our part as the world's No. 1 polluter," Lonner said.

John Elder, a Middlebury College professor of English and environmental studies, began the walk by reading aloud the Frost poem "The Road Not Taken."

"We're trying to draw attention to the gravity of the situation," he said.

So why was Elder dressed as a maple tree, complete with 3-foot-tall leafy headdress?

"We hope this will feel like a celebration as well as a protest," he said.

Participants walked 10.5 miles on Routes 125 and 7 Thursday before stopping in Middlebury for an educational program on the town green.

On Friday, participants will walk 13 miles north on back roads including Seymour Street, Morgan Horse Farm Road, Pearson Road and Green Street to Vergennes for a 5 p.m. program on the town green.

On Saturday, participants will walk 11.5 miles on Route 7 to Charlotte for a 5 p.m. program at the senior center.

On Sunday, participants will hear McKibben speak at the Charlotte Congregational Church at 10 a.m., then walk 5.8 miles on Route 7 to a 4 p.m. program at Shelburne Farms.

On Monday, participants will walk 8 miles on Route 7 to Burlington, where a Labor Day rally at 3 p.m. at Battery Park will feature statewide political candidates who want to speak about climate change.

Organizers are inviting walkers to join them at any and all points, which are listed on the Web site [vtwalc.org](http://vtwalc.org).

"It's really good to look around and see 8-month-olds and 80-year-olds," McKibben said Thursday. "This is the most important issue on the planet. It feels really good to do something about it."